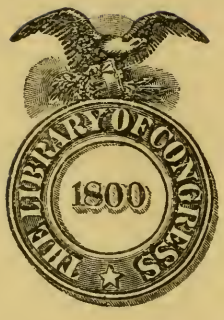
CANDLE
FLAME



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CANDLE FLAME

A PLAY

[*for reading only*]

BY

KATHARINE HOWARD
Author of "Eve," "The Book of the Serpent," etc.

BOSTON
SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY
1914

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no1

TO THE AUTHOR OF "CANDLE FLAME"

Like aromatic wax your genius burns.
Is it the wholesome bayberry I scent,
Or subtile pungence of the Orient?
Swift in your thoughts, as in enchanted urns,
The seething, pregnant substance deftly turns
To quickening shapes. So, dipped in images,
Molded by art, the beauty you express
Becomes a candle for which the dark Earth
yearns.

But the flame! Was it kindled in the East,
By the lavish Persian rose whose petals are
Florescent fires? Or was it just a star
Touched your taper and blessed it for the feast?
How the ochre rose fades to ashen night,
And still the silver flame spirals its light!

CHARLES PEARSON ANTHONY.

TO

ELISABETH

NOTE

"Les enfants de cire jouaient un grand rôle dans la sorcellerie du moyen âge. Quiconque voulait faire tomber son ennemi en langueur fabriquait une petite figure de cette espêce et la donnait a une jeune fille, qui la portait emmaillottée durant neuf mois dans son giron: les neuf mois révolus, un mauvais prêtre baptisait l'enfant, à la clarté de la lune, dans l'eau courante d'un moulin. On lui écrivait au front le nom de la personne qu'on voulait faire mourir, au dos le mot Bélial, et le sortilége ne manquait jamais d'opérer."

Barzaz-Briez.
Hersart De La Villemarqué.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

THE WOMAN
GENEVIEVE
THE OLD SEIGNEUR
SIR YALVAIN
THE NURSE
THE SERVING MAN

CANDLE FLAME

ACT I

SCENE I

A forest in Bretagne.

A shrine in the forest. Two are talking—a woman and a young girl. They are seated on a large flat stone and do not see the shrine. . . . It is a sombre forest, but here and there the sunlight pierces through the trees. It strikes obliquely across the shrine like a burning shaft, and touches lightly the brow of the young girl.

THE WOMAN

It cannot do you harm; it is made of wax.

THE YOUNG GIRL

The candles were made of wax that burned around my mother. There were

so many candles, they burned straight up to heaven. Oh! it was beautiful! They seemed like spirits telling me that I must do no wrong.

(*The Woman trembles.*)

THE WOMAN

If you will wear this image next your heart—for nine months near your heart —I will give to you a necklace of rubies . . . rubies red like drops of blood. They will show well on your white neck.

THE YOUNG GIRL

Like drops of blood? Oh! I would rather have them pearls. (*The Woman shivers.*) This image has a look like someone I have forgotten. . . . I must have dreamed it. (*She caresses the waxen image and laughs softly.*) I never had a doll so small. . . . The time has

passed for me to play with dolls. . . . I have had fifteen years.

THE WOMAN

That is the reason you should hide it; the others would make sport of you.

THE YOUNG GIRL

Oh! a secret! a secret! But you said I must not tell; a secret is not sweet until 'tis told. I could tell Nurse—but no. . . . I told her of the time I met you by the fountain and she was angry. . . . When I told her how you changed from old to young—how sometimes you grew beautiful—she said you were a Druid Priestess. (*She crosses herself.*) Have you not heard the legends? Oh! she was angry; she forbade me going to the fountain; she said perhaps you were the spirit of a Priestess, for in the ancient time this

was a sacred forest, a Druid forest where maidens were sacrificed. Nurse said you might have done me harm. (*The Woman shrinks away from her.*) Are you the spirit of a Priestess? For when you look at me sometimes I am afraid. . . . I feel a chill go over me—and yet I come again. . . . (*She caresses the image as if it were a doll.*)

Why do you love me enough to give me this image which you hold so dear? If I were beautiful, then I should know you could not choose but love me—all beauty is beloved.

When Nurse sees me looking in the great mirror in the banquet hall, she calls me to come away—for fear the mirror may crack and fall out of its frame. The angels all have yellow hair, and mine? There is no name for it, she says, unless she calls it with my eyes—which are not even blue, but pansy. I grieve about it

some . . . and yet . . . sometimes when I am looking, I like myself . . . perhaps it is one always likes one's self—do you?

(*A vivid shaft of sunlight pierces through the trees and strikes across the eyes of The Woman.*)

THE WOMAN

Oh! oh! Something has blinded me—as if a sword struck me across the eyes.

(*They rise and see the shrine in a glory of sunlight. . . . The Woman shrinks back into the shadow.*)

THE YOUNG GIRL

Oh! Look! look! It is a shrine! See! see! the lovely sunlight falling on Our Lady. (*She laughs and holds the image out into the light.*)

ACT II

SCENE I

The garden of a ruined chateau on the edge of the forest. The Seigneur old and blind sits sleeping in his chair. The old Nurse is knitting and the aged Serving Man goes back and forth in his work from chateau to garden. All is worn and ancient; the only youth and freshness is the young girl Genevieve.

THE NURSE

There is something you hide. You do not talk of late. What is it that you find to keep you silent? It is no good thing —no good thing is hidden. What is it that is hidden in the forest?

GENEVIEVE

There is a shrine.

THE NURSE

A shrine?

GENEVIEVE

Yes, a shrine—an ancient shrine.

THE NURSE

How can that be? A shrine, and I not know of it?

GENEVIEVE

It is so old, and green with moss. A little path leads up to it and the sun shines through the trees upon Our Lady. It is the only place in all the forest where the sun shines.

THE NURSE

Aha! I will go with you to see the shrine.

GENEVIEVE

No! no! It is too far! The path is full of rocks and roots of trees to trip you up, and places hard to climb.

THE NURSE

Ah! When I had my legs, no goat could climb so well as I.

(*The Old Seigneur rouses from his nap and searches around for his tall gold-headed stick. It has fallen so that he cannot reach it.*)

THE OLD SEIGNEUR

Genevieve! Genevieve! Where is the child? Genevieve!

GENEVIEVE

Here, here, Grandfather, close to you. Here is your stick, Grandfather. (*She places it against his hand.*)

THE OLD SEIGNEUR

Come, read the book again. We left off in an interesting place—about the purification of their sins. The candles had been lighted.

(*The Nurse moves near to listen.*)

GENEVIEVE (*reading slowly*)

'And while the candles burned, their souls went up to God. Their carnal bodies were the wax, the flames their souls—and when the flames had burned away their sinful bodies, their spirits were purified and safe in heaven.'

O Grandfather! may I not read about the troubadours? 'Tis so much easier, it

will cheer you (*she caresses him timidly*) —that part about the cavaliers and the gay ladies. They were so beautiful, Grandfather—ladies such as you used to know.

THE OLD SEIGNEUR

Yes! yes! We will have that. Begin about the ladies.

GENEVIEVE

Oh! thank you, Grandfather. I will fetch the book. (*She runs into the chateau, returning quickly with a large illuminated folio.*)

THE NURSE (*with pride*)

She will please you, Sir; she reads well.

GENEVIEVE (*reading*)

' "Now bring the maid before me," said

the Lady Jocelyn, "that I may know if she be fair." But when the maid was brought, she could not see her beauty for the soiled and ragged gown.

' "I cannot judge of beauty in such guise," said the Lady Jocelyn. "Go, take the maid among you, and bathe her feet, and comb her yellow hair, and clothe her in a silken gown, and put a golden chain and ornaments upon her, that I may justly know if she be fair." '

(*Genevieve closes the book, dropping on her knees and clasping her hands on her grandfather's arm.*)

O Grandfather! I am so old! Can I not have the key? This gown of faded green I wear is like a rag! Indeed, Grandfather, I am like the 'ragged maid.' (*She caresses her grandfather.*) The key! the key! Grandfather! may I not have the key? Let me unlock the chest and wear my mother's gowns, that I too

may be beautiful. I am so old. (*She whispers in his ear.*)

THE OLD SEIGNEUR

So old. . . . It seems the other day . . .

GENEVIEVE

I have had fifteen years.

THE NURSE

She has had fifteen years come Whitsuntide. My Lady Genevieve had fifteen years when Sir Alain stole her away and married her.

GENEVIEVE

The key, Grandfather, the key! (*She caresses The Old Seigneur and whispers in his ear.*)

THE OLD SEIGNEUR

This is the key. (*He takes it from a long gold chain around his neck and gives it to her.*) This is the key; be careful of it, child.

GENEVIEVE

Oh! thank you! thank you, Grandfather! (*She embraces him joyously, and runs quickly into the chateau.*)

THE OLD SEIGNEUR

(*calling after her*)

Guard it well, my child, guard it well.

(*The Nurse hastens after her into the chateau.*)

SCENE II

The chateau garden. The Old Seigneur is talking with a cavalier.

THE OLD SEIGNEUR (*musingly*)

So you are Yalvain, youngest son of my old friend.

THE CAVALIER

Yes, Seigneur, I am that son born to a broken family during the 'Wars,' when fell Tinteniac and my sire in the same battle. I came into a house of broken fortunes which have been somewhat retrieved. My mother has spoken to me of your castle in its former grandeur. She has told me how, bereft of all by fortune of the 'Wars,' you live here in this ruined chateau and are honored by so doing.

Now she has sent me as a suitor for the hand of the young daughter of 'Genevieve the Fair' and Sir Alain.

(*Genevieve suddenly comes from the chateau. She does not see The Cavalier, who starts to his feet and gazes intently at her.*)

GENEVIEVE

O Grandfather! if you could only see me! I am so beautiful! so beautiful! so happy! It is a fairy key that opens to me all my mother's treasures. (*The sunlight falls upon her, making her beautiful in her gown of green and gold brocade. Suddenly she sees The Cavalier—she drops the key.*) Oh! oh! My dream! My waxen image!

THE OLD SEIGNEUR

'Tis little Genevieve of whom we spoke but now. She is a good child, obedient

and affectionate, though sometimes wilful; and has not much of beauty—so her nurse tells me.

THE CAVALIER

Ha! By my faith she lies! or has no eyes for beauty—for when I saw her my heart was like to strangle me. Such beauty have I not seen till now!

THE OLD SEIGNEUR

Ah! So? 'Tis well. This gentleman, my child, is Sir Yalvain, the son of an old friend. Ere many days have passed you two shall wed, and I may give up care, and die in peace.

Come, child, are you not satisfied? He seems a goodly man and godly, as he is his mother's son. Come, give The Cavalier your hand, and let me hear you speak.

(*Genevieve approaches timidly and gives her hand.*)

GENEVIEVE

Pardon, pardon, Grandfather. It is all strange to me, as if I dreamed it in the middle of the night.

THE OLD SEIGNEUR

What? What? What's this about the middle of the night? Is it not broad day?

(*The Serving Man brings wine.*)

THE SERVING MAN

The wine is served, Seigneur.

(*With some difficulty The Old Seigneur rises to his feet, assisted on either side by Genevieve and Sir Yalvain.*)

THE OLD SEIGNEUR

Give me the wine, that I may drink your healths. (*Genevieve gives him the wine. He raises the cup to his lips.*) A

long life and a joyous life—as long as mine, with more of ease. (*He drinks. . . . The silver cup shakes in his hand and falls.*) Yalvain! Give me your arm. . . . Oh! oh! 'Tis Death! (*He sinks back into his chair, trying to speak aloud. Sir Yalvain stoops to listen.*) I trust her to you, Yalvain . . .

(*Genevieve falls sobbing on her knees, laying her hands on his. The Nurse comes hobbling from the chateau where she has been listening.*)

THE NURSE

The priest! the priest! Go fetch the priest!

SIR YALVAIN

The surgeon. Go fetch the surgeon.

THE NURSE

'Tis Death! Go fetch the priest! (*She speaks aside with The Serving Man.*)

THE OLD SEIGNEUR (*faintly*)

The priest . . . the priest. . . . The wine is spilt. The drinking cup is fallen. . . . It is Death.

ACT III

SCENE I

Before the curtain rises the chanting of the "Miserere" is heard.

The curtain rises, showing an avenue in the forest. A funeral procession has gone by. The chanting is heard down the forest. A procession of nuns passes, bearing candles. The chanting can be heard fainter and fainter down the avenues of the wood. Silence for a few moments. . . .

The curtain falls.

SCENE II

The shrine in the forest. The Woman sits upon the large flat stone. Sir Yalvain stands before her.

The Woman speaks—as she speaks, she grows beautiful—a glitter as of gold shows when her long cloak falls open.

THE WOMAN

Did I sin more than you? Because I am a woman and frail, does that make my sin more? Because—a woman may be a mother—because a mother may be divine—because—because our Christ was born of Woman? Yes—yes, 'tis true. . . . A woman's sin is more than man's because of Mary. (*The sunlight falls upon the shrine and, refracting, touches her.*)

'Tis not for you or for the lack of you

I grieve; no, it is something else. . . . What? . . . I forget. . . . I made an image out of wax. . . . I made a virgin wear it next her heart— (*She pauses. . . . A look of utter blankness comes into her face.*) Why? Why? . . . I have forgotten something. . . . Oh! Because 'revenge is sweet' I have heard somewhere . . . 'revenge is sweet.'

The image is like you, and I could melt your life away—and play with it, . . . now fast, . . . now slow. (*She laughs.*) I had a lover once. . . . Oh! oh! why can I not remember? I know—it is the pearl I miss . . . the pearl I wore so long. . . . I lost it somewhere in this wood. (*She kneels and searches among the fallen leaves.*) I get so tired searching among the dead leaves, among the fallen twigs. It was so white, . . . so pure, . . . and it was mine, . . . all mine, . . . and there was something else . . . something . . .

I remember! There was pain! . . . I remember . . . I was in a tomb, . . . nothing but walls and silence. . . . Oh! that silence. . . . I shrieked to it, . . . and no one heard. . . . Oh! oh! I want my pearl. . . . I want happiness. Do you think that I may find it if I search always?

(*Genevieve comes singing through the wood. Sir Yalvain slips away among the trees.*)

GENEVIEVE (*singing*)

'And as the candles burned away,
Their souls went up to God
At early morn or close of day
As prayers go up to God.'

(*She meets The Woman and they walk slowly up and down the path and sit together at the foot of the shrine.*)

GENEVIEVE

I have been here three days at sunset time to find you. Such things have happened as never happened in the life of mortal maid before. They happened all at once, at the same moment. I have a lover and my grandfather has died. He gave me to Sir Yalvain and he died. (*The Woman looks at her intently. As she looks a smile grows on her face.*) All happened in a moment as I tell you. Do you remember my saying that the image looked like some one I had known in dreams? It was Sir Yalvain. I had grown to love the image from wearing it close to my heart. So—when he came, I loved him. Is it not beautiful?

(*The Woman sits with hands clasped on her knees. She looks at her wide eyed and sorrowful.*)

THE WOMAN

I know not—is love beautiful?

GENEVIEVE

Oh! beautiful! My heart has grown so large and kind. I love all things. I am so happy that if I die to-night, I shall go straight to heaven. (*She clasps her hands and gazes upward.*) I feel, I am already there. . . . Is not love beautiful?

THE WOMAN

I know not . . . is it so? Is it a pearl? I lost a pearl . . . I lost it somewhere in this wood.

GENEVIEVE

My grandfather has told me of a pearl beyond all price; perhaps it is that pearl.

THE WOMAN

I do not know. . . . I have forgotten.

GENEVIEVE

It was the waxen image made me think of love. I pray you let me have my way with it—to mould it to a candle to burn before the shrine.

THE WOMAN

I made it of a candle. A sacred candle that burned before the altar Easter morn. See! see! The wick is there; if you but scrape a bit of wax you'll find it, and it will burn as clear a flame, as clear a flame as any candle . . . (*she trembles*) as clear . . . as clear a flame. . . . O! Mary! Mother Mary!! (*she crosses herself*) I took it from the altar Easter morn.

GENEVIEVE

I read a book which said that as the candles burned, all sin was burned away.

I made a little song about it as I came through the wood. (*She sings*)

'And as the candles burned away,
Their souls went up to God
At early morn or close of day
As prayers go up to God.'

(*In the black shadows of the wood Sir Yalvain stands and listens. Genevieve touches The Woman's hand.*)

And may I have the image to do with as I will?

THE WOMAN

Yes! Yes! You may have it to burn . . . to burn. . . . How goes the song? 'And as the candle burns so sin is burned away'?

GENEVIEVE

Sometimes I used to be afraid of you, but now I love you. Where Love is, there

is no room for fear. Love is so great, there is no room for anything but Love.

(*She kisses her. The setting sun throws a rose light over The Virgin, over The Woman and Genevieve.*)

The same scene—a little later. The Woman is not there. The Man stands in the shadow. The light is sombre after the sun has set. The image burns before the shrine.

GENEVIEVE (*praying*)

Hail, Mary! Gracious Mother! Hail, Mary! Queen of Heaven! The book said, 'As the candles burn so sin is burned away!' O Mother! make the flame burn all my sins away. I am so often wilful. . . . And if the thing be possible that he has sinned, let his sins burn with mine, so that we both be pure. Oh! make my grandfather to know that he did well to trust me to Sir Yalvain . . . for that I love him, and am happy in my love. That all is well with little Genevieve.

O Holy Mother! See how the candle

burns! The flame is clear . . . I feel myself grow pure . . . I feel the wings of angels touch my head . . . I seem so near to God.

(*Sir Yalvain steps from behind the trees. He crosses himself. He kneels behind her . . . and bows his head.*)

The same scene. Later. The forest is quite dark. The image burns low. The Woman is alone. She kneels before the shrine and prays in broken, interrupted sentences.

THE WOMAN

O Holy Mother! Mary! Mother! look upon me, for I am Woman, too, and worn—and faint—with grief. . . . Once I loved. The world was Sanctuary! All things seemed made of purity. . . . 'Twas such as Heaven must be. . . . And I the centre . . . as if I also might be the Mother of a Christ!

. . . I could hear the angels singing—'Holy! Holy! Holy!' And then . . . I have forgotten . . . I have forgotten. . . . But I search always . . . because

. . . (*she sobs*) because . . . my arms are empty.

(*The image flares and goes out. The moon rises slowly behind the sitting Virgin. It makes a halo around her head. The light falls in soft radiance over the kneeling woman. The Virgin leans and lays the little Christ within her arms. A halo slowly grows about The Woman's head.*)

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